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Group Sets Safety Net To Snatch Defectors At Olympic Games

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LOS ANGELES, April 13—Youth gangs in this run-down neighborhood have spray-painted red, black and white graffiti over the beige brick wall guarding the little square building on West 24th Street. A few workmen are patching some interior walls. A colorful mural of Tallinn overlooking the Baltic Sea haunts a dark and empty meeting room.

Estonian House, for 30 years a little-noticed part of decaying central Los Angeles, does not seem to be the sort of place to expect an international incident. But it has been designated a possible "safe house" in a plan to encourage mass defections at the 1984 Olympic Games here.

In an escalating series of outraged complaints, officials of the Soviet Union have accused the U.S. government of encouraging the activities of a small group of anti-Soviet Americans with ties to eastern Europe who want to keep the Russians out of Los Angeles altogether.

The Soviets, in demanding a special meeting of the International Olympic Committee on the issue, have inflated the importance of the Ban the Soviets Coalition out of proportion to the coalition's numbers, but revealed what an international propaganda battleground the Games may be this summer.

Tony Mazeika, a coalition member from the Baltic American Freedom League, speaks of plans to create as many as 500 possible safe houses and "a network of different people speaking different languages" ready to help any defector from the Soviet bloc.

At a league meeting this week, Mazeika said, Estonian House was identified as a likely gathering point. From the nearby corner of 24th Street and Ellendale place, one can easily see the University of Southern California high-rise dormitories less than a mile away from where hundreds of Olympic athletes will stay in one of the two Olympic villages.

State Department spokesmen have denied sponsoring or encouraging the coalition's activities. But Mazeika said members of his league met with Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams on March 17 at a human rights conference in the Ambassador Hotel here.

Abrams said this week that he told Mazeika and others that the State Department realized the possibility of defections at the Games and would be ready as usual to offer physical security to those seeking asylum, although

the department was neither encouraging nor discouraging defections.

David Finzer, an Anglican priest serving as the coalition's representative in Washington, said, however, that he felt the State Department had been of little help. The coalition failed to persuade the department to bar some of the 25 Aeroflot flights the Soviets plan to make to Los Angeles during the Games.

"We get some off-the-record sympathy, and that's all," Finzer said.

One Reagan administration official said the White House had received Soviet complaints about the coalition, based on the assumption that "all countries can control these things."

The official said the White House passed the complaints on to the State Department and had done nothing to encourage the coalition. He said the administration wanted the Soviets at the Olympic Games so that President Reagan will have a "world stage" on which to appear as an international leader in an election year.

David W. Balsiger, the coalition's national executive director, Orange County advertising executive and author, said the Aeroflot flights were approved through "pressure from [Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee President Peter V.] Ueberroth on [presidential counselor Michael K.] Deaver and others."

But Balsiger said that the addition of 2,000 Soviet officials brought in on the Aeroflot flights "may not be such a disadvantage, because there will now be a lot more opportunities for defections."

In its endeavors the coalition has secured the help of several Soviet bloc defectors, particularly former Novosti press agency editor Yuri Bezmenov. Bezmenov has changed his name to Tomas D. Schuman since the CIA helped him surreptitiously leave a diplomatic assignment in India in 1970 and now works as a writer and political analyst in Los Angeles.

In an interview, Schuman denounced the U.S. decision to admit a large Soviet cruise ship to Long Beach and Los Angeles harbors. He said such ships keep entertainment facilities for visitors on their upper decks, while maintaining "war games" electronic surveillance equipment on lower decks to monitor U.S. radio and telephone transmissions.

The coalition began with a small group of southern Californians upset at what they regarded as a weak official American response to the Soviet downing of a Korean Air Lines jetliner with 269 people aboard last September.

"I got quite irritated that the only action this country took was a few strong statements and kicking out three Aeroflot ticket agents," Balsiger said. "It could have been my kids on that plane."

Balsiger, who puts his age at "about 35," is a restless Costa Mesa entrepreneur who has run advertising campaigns, pursued land deals, campaigned unsuccessfully for Congress and written two best-selling books later made into movies, "In Search of Noah's Ark," and "The